

Donation of the Month

Object: Carry A. Nation Hatchet Brooch
Catalog #: 1975.1.80
Donor: Marjorie Bryant



Legend has it that in May 1881 the first business to open up shop in the newly founded town of Rogers was a saloon. Even though it only consisted of a couple of jugs of homebrew sitting on the back of a wagon, the new business was sure to have pleased some and dismayed others. Over a century later alcohol is still a hot topic in Benton County as leaders, business owners, churches, and residents debate the wet/dry issue. Should the county remain “dry” and continue to prohibit the sale of alcohol except in private clubs or should it go “wet” and allow liquor stores to open up shop?

The late 19th and early 20th centuries were troubled times. Laws weren't enforced, corruption was epidemic, and there were few social services for addicts or the poor. Women became reformers because of their perceived societal roles as moral guardians and defenders of the home and family. Female activists used speeches and demonstrations to educate the public and encourage male lawmakers to legislate morality at a time when women didn't yet have the right to vote or serve in public office.

Carry Amelia Moore Gloyd Nation (1846-1911) was one such reformer. Born in Kentucky and raised in Missouri, in 1865 she met and married Dr. Charles Gloyd, a medical practitioner and school teacher. His love of drink, picked up during times spent idle in Civil War camps and continued during social activities with the Masons, caused a rift in their marriage. Less than two years after they married he died of alcoholism, leaving Carry with a young daughter to care for. She taught school for a few years and then in 1877 married David Nation, an unsuccessful lawyer, minister, and newspaper man. The family moved to

Texas and ran a hotel before moving to Kansas in 1890.

In 1880 Kansas became the first state to prohibit the manufacture and sale of alcohol but this law wasn't always enforced. Saloons were often the first business to open in a frontier town, serving as unofficial centers of drinking, gambling, prostitution, and other criminal activities. Carry's religious beliefs and personal acquaintance with the evils of intemperance led her to the Women's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.) where she served as a jail evangelist and staged prayer vigils outside saloons.

But she began having hallucinations and in 1900 had a dream which led her to use violent tactics. Believing that the Lord was on her side, she took rocks and broken bricks into the saloons of Kiowa, Kansas, and smashed fixtures and bottles of alcohol, all the while singing hymns and saying prayers. She and her followers continued on to other Kansas towns where they were often beaten by saloon owners' wives, threatened by mobs, and thrown in jail. Although her violence was a matter of consternation for the W.C.T.U., her aggressive tactics certainly made folks take notice of the temperance movement. In 1901 she spoke before the Kansas legislature. With a nod to the struggle for suffrage she said, "You refused me the vote and I had to use a rock." Increased public support for prohibition influenced legislators to enact new temperance laws, laws which were eventually enforced.

All this frenetic activity and notoriety took a toll on her marriage. Saying, "I married this woman because I needed someone to run my house," David Nation cited desertion when he divorced his wife in 1901. Her battles in Kansas over, Carry Nation took her message to the people, speaking before large audiences in the U.S., Canada, and the British Isles.

She came to Northwest Arkansas in February 1906 and spoke in Rogers, Bentonville, and Springdale. A newspaper account at the time quipped, "There were no saloons in this section for her to smash but it is claimed several druggists hid their Peruna bottles under the counter until she was safely out of town." (Peruna was a patent medicine almost entirely made up of alcohol.) At the Rogers Opera House on Walnut Street she talked about the evils of liquor and smoking, "affirmed the infallibility and divine origin of the Bible," and recounted incidents from her career as a saloon smasher. She also sold her trademark hatchet brooches and stick pins.

Nation first began selling the souvenirs after a man heard her speaking on the street in Topeka, Kansas. He brought her several small pewter hatchets from a candy store, suggesting she sell them to help pay her fines. After that she carried hatchet jewelry wherever she went, once saying, "...they will advertise my cause, help me, and be a little keep sake from the hand that raised the hatchet." The brooch seen here, donated by Marjorie Bryant, has a rhinestone set in a mother-of-pearl blade and bears the words "Carry A Nation," referring to one of the reformer's mottoes, "Carry A Nation for my baby, for my loved ones, Carry A Nation against the saloons." No doubt this brooch was purchased by a member of the Bryant family, longtime city leaders and business owners in Rogers.

Erwin Funk, the junior editor of the *Rogers Democrat*, paid a visit to Nation while she was staying at the Nashburg hotel. Questioning one of the men with him, Nation asked "Do you smoke?" He denied it but she examined his fingers and breath and said, "Well, I hate smoking but I hate a liar still worse." Recounting his interview with the infamous Carry Nation, Funk said that he: *...found her a very amiable old lady—if allowed to do all the talking and never contradicted. She is short and stout, has gray hair, wears glasses, dresses in black, cares nothing for style, wears an old-fashioned black bonnet, says she never saw the man she was afraid of, and confesses that she will be 60 years old next November.*

...Talking to a person, she looks you square in the eye and there is no dodging her questions. When some joke or remark was made at her expense, she laughed loudest of all, but nothing daunted, returned to the attack. Of course there is no use arguing any point with her; [you might] as well try to dam Niagara Falls with a shingle. But she is sincere, I believe; sees the great horror of intemperance and is fighting it as best she knows. Whether she accomplishes more harm than good is not given for me to say.

When Nation was at the railroad depot in Rogers, one of the Frisco officials decided to test her mettle and wait on her himself. With a hat on his head and a cigar in his mouth, he asked, "What can I do for you

lady?" As the story goes, "Mrs. Nation's eyes snapped fire as she grabbed the cigar from the official's mouth and threw it on the floor." She said, "Take off your hat when you speak to a woman!" Reportedly the onlookers "roared with laughter" and the official "beat a hasty retreat."

Nation continued taking on speaking engagements but poor health and advancing age led her around 1909 to retire to Eureka Springs, Arkansas, east of Rogers in neighboring Carroll County. She called her home "Hatchet Hall" and still fought whiskey and tobacco, but in a subdued way; she didn't conduct a single "hatchetation" in any of the town's saloons. She gave money to the families of alcoholics, operated a boarding house for needy women, opened up a school in her home, and continued speaking to local audiences. Collapsing during a speech in January 1911 she managed to utter, "I have done what I could." She was taken to a Kansas hospital and died five months later; she was buried in Missouri.

Prohibition and the regulation of liquor has always been an issue of contention in Arkansas, whether in the state as a whole or in Northwest Arkansas and Benton County in particular. Religious morals often were a factor and formed the backbone of such organizations as the W.C.T.U., founded in 1874, and the Arkansas State Christian Temperance Union, founded in 1879. Temperance organizations like these and activists like Carry Nation helped foment the Prohibition movement and change laws.

Where once there was favor for the licensing and sale of alcohol in Arkansas, by the early 1900s the tide had changed and more people favored Prohibition. In 1885 the state legislature made it illegal for saloons to open on Sunday; a few years later children were allowed to purchase alcohol (for their parents, presumably) only if they had written permission. In 1899 it became illegal to buy alcohol for someone else.

Counties held elections to determine whether they would be "wet" or "dry." In 1894 Benton County voted dry but in 1900 it voted wet; this latter vote was overturned when election commissioners (perhaps displeased with the results) demanded a recount in Esculapia township. In the end 11 votes ruled the day and the county went dry.

Citizens had another way to fight the sale of alcohol in their community, by petitioning the Arkansas legislature to create special alcohol-free districts extending three miles from churches and schools. With so many of these facilities in the county, it became difficult to open up a saloon. One owner was obliged to locate his business halfway between Rogers and Bentonville in order to escape the no-alcohol boundaries.

In 1915 the Arkansas general assembly enacted the first statewide Prohibition law. Its repeal was attempted in 1916 during a referendum, but the measure lost by 50,000 votes. National Prohibition was finally put into place in 1920, making the issue moot amongst Arkansas voters. The law didn't stop alcohol consumption, though, it just drove it underground, giving rise to the speakeasy, moonshine, and bootlegging cultures of the roaring '20s. Ironically, it was the lawlessness of illegal alcohol, the weariness of moral crusades, a distrust of a rapidly expanding government, and a belief that morals should be determined in the home rather than legislated, that led women's groups to advocate for the repeal of Prohibition.

With the repeal in 1933, Arkansas counties once again wrangled over the issue. John Brown Sr., founder of a Christian university in Siloam Springs on the western edge of Benton County, led the fight against alcohol. A special election was held in October 1944 and the county went dry by 90 votes (although Rogers voted wet by 100 votes). Supporters of liquor sales protested, saying that a significant number of men were unable to vote because of their war duties.

A second special vote was scheduled for November 1944. Before the vote Brown weighed in, saying, "...if the manufacturer, and the seller, and the buyer of liquor go to hell, so much the voter who supports the wets. A vote for the wets is a sure and certain ticket to hell." Dry proponents dropped leaflets from planes and gave rousing speeches in town squares. This time the county stayed dry with a 2-to-1 vote.

And despite periodic debate on the issue it has remained dry ever since. In 2005 the issue has come up

again, with many of the same arguments proffered for and against. Proponents for a wet county cite increased revenue and freedom of choice while proponents for a dry county cite increased crime, strip bars, and incidences of DUI. Before yet another vote on alcohol can go forward it will take 38% of Benton County's registered voters—34,861 people—to sign a petition.

The Benton County of today is not what it was 100 (or even 20) years ago. The local economy is strong and growing and new emigrants, many from larger, "wetter" cities, have brought their own cultures and desires. But big-box churches are on the rise and prosperous liquor stores line three of the county's borders. Will Benton County continue to follow the admonitions of Carry A. Nation?

CREDITS

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